
**Children & Family Services
Committee**

HB 1152

Brief Description: Creating a Washington early learning council.

Sponsors: Representatives Kagi, Fromhold, Jarrett, Schual-Berke, Walsh, Quall, B. Sullivan, Grant, Ormsby, Kessler, Simpson, Moeller, Lovick, Roberts, Chase, Williams, P. Sullivan, Tom, Morrell, McIntire, Kenney, Haigh, McDermott, Dickerson, Santos and Linville.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Washington Early Learning Council (Council).
- Requires the Council to develop an early learning plan.
- Requires the Council to develop a voluntary, quality-based, graduated rating system and a tiered-reimbursement system for licensed child care.
- Requires the Department of Social and Health Services to implement the tiered-reimbursement system.

Hearing Date: January 27, 2005.

Staff: Cynthia Forland (786-7152).

Background:

In 2000, the Legislature directed the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to conduct a study of the best method for coordinating and consolidating child care and early education programs funded by the state. The Child Care and Early Learning Organizational Study, which the OFM produced in response, provided the following recommendations:

- adopt an umbrella mission statement that captures all child care and early learning programs;
- combine programs with similar or duplicate functions and missions;
- streamline the current configuration by reducing the number of state agencies involved in the child care licensing process;
- assign an interagency task force to examine and reduce the differences in program service standards; and
- coordinate training for providers regarding state agency rules by all programs.

In response to this report, the Office of the Governor undertook administrative action to consolidate child care and early learning programs in the state, the primary component of which was the creation of the Division of Child Care and Early Learning (DCCEL) within the Economic Services Administration in the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

Currently, child care and early learning programs in the state are administered through three state agencies: the DSHS, the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED), and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The DCCEL within the DSHS licenses child care homes and centers, develops policy and procedures for the state's child care subsidy program, and directs the Head Start-State Collaboration Project. The CTED administers the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), which is the state's preschool program. The OSPI administers services and programs relating to child care and early learning including family literacy programs, special education for children three years of age and older, and the nutrition assistance program for child care. Training and professional development programs for early learning professionals are available through such sources as the State Training and Registry System and the state's higher education institutions.

The Child Care Coordinating Committee was established in state law in order to provide coordination and communication among state agencies responsible for child care and early childhood education services, serve as an advisory coordinator for all state agencies responsible for early childhood or child care programs, and annually review state programs and make recommendations to state agencies and the Legislature to will maximize funding and promote furtherance of the state's child care services policy.

Summary of Bill:

The Washington Early Learning Council (Council) is established in the Governor's Office for the purpose of providing vision, leadership, and direction to the improvement, realignment, and expansion of early learning programs and services for children birth to five years of age in order to better meet the early learning needs of children and their families. "Early learning programs and services" are defined to include the following: regulation of child care; regulation of state, private, and nonprofit preschool programs; child care subsidy programs; and training and professional development programs for early learning professionals. The goal of the Council is to build upon existing efforts and recommend new initiatives to create a high-quality, accessible, and comprehensive early learning system that benefits all young children whose parents choose it.

Early Learning Plan

The Council is required to develop an early learning plan to improve the accessibility and quality of early learning programs and services throughout the state. The initial focus must be on developing and implementing quality improvements through the following mechanisms, which must initially be implemented in two pilot sites:

- voluntary, quality-based, graduated rating system to provide information to parents on the quality of child care programs and to provide incentives for quality improvements; and
- tiered-reimbursement system for state-subsidized child care to improve the quality of care for children participating in state-funded care.

The Council is required to make recommendations to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature, to include the following:

- changes in existing early learning programs and services, including the administration of those programs and services, to improve their efficiency, effectiveness, and quality;
- development of new early learning programs and services that build upon or replace existing programs and services;
- appropriate levels and sources of funding to meet statewide and local need for early learning programs and services, including public-private partnerships; and
- how to maximize available early learning resources to ensure children are receiving continuity of care.

The Council is required to make use of existing reports, research, planning efforts, and programs, including, but not limited to, the following: the federal Early Head Start program, the federal Head Start program, the state Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program, the state's Essential Academic Learning Requirements and K-3 Grade Level Expectations, the Washington State Early Learning and Development Benchmarks, existing tiered-reimbursement initiatives, and the work of the Child Care Coordinating Committee.

Quality Rating System

The Council is required to develop a voluntary, quality-based, graduated rating system consisting of levels of quality to be achieved by licensed child care providers. In developing the voluntary rating system, the Council must seek to build upon existing partnerships and initiate new partnerships between the public and private sectors.

In developing the voluntary rating system, the Council must establish a system of tiers as the basis for the rating system's levels of quality. In developing the system of tiers, the Council must take into consideration the following quality criteria:

- child-to-staff ratios;
- group size;
- learning environment;
- curriculum;
- parent and family involvement;
- staff qualifications and training;
- staff professional development;
- staff compensation, including wage progression based on formal education;
- staff stability;
- accreditation;
- program evaluation; and
- program administrative policies and procedures.

In developing the voluntary rating system, the Council is also required to establish quality assurance measures as well as a mechanism for system evaluation.

Implementation of the voluntary rating system will initially consist of two pilot sites in different geographic regions of the state with demonstrated public-private partnerships to support implementation. In developing the voluntary rating system, the Council is required to make recommendations concerning both initial and subsequent statewide implementation of the rating system, including the following:

- potential implementing entities;
- sources of funding for implementation;

- necessary infrastructure for facilitating and supporting participation in the rating system; and
- strategies for raising public awareness of the rating system.

The Council is required to complete development of the voluntary rating system by December 1, 2005, and begin implementation of the two pilot sites by March 30, 2006.

Tiered-Reimbursement System

The Council is required to develop a tiered-reimbursement system that provides higher rates of reimbursement for state-subsidized child care for licensed child care providers that achieve one or more levels of quality above basic licensing requirements in accordance with the voluntary quality-based graduated rating system developed by the Council.

In developing the tiered-reimbursement system, the Council must review existing tiered-reimbursement initiatives in the state and integrate those initiatives into the tiered-reimbursement system.

The Council is required to complete development of the tiered-reimbursement system by December 1, 2005.

The DSHS is required to implement the tiered-reimbursement system developed by the Council. Implementation will initially consist of the two pilot sites in which the voluntary quality rating system is initially implemented, with statewide implementation to follow.

In order to be eligible to participate in the tiered-reimbursement system, child care providers must provide staff wage progression.

The DSHS is required to begin implementation of the two pilot sites by March 30, 2006.

Membership of the Washington Early Learning Council

The Council must include representation from public, nonprofit, and for-profit entities, and its membership must reflect regional, racial, and cultural diversity to ensure representation of the needs of all children and families in the state. The Council will consist of 17 members, as follows:

- one representative each of the Governor's Office, the DSHS, the Department of Health, and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, appointed by the Governor; one representative of the OSPI, appointed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction;
- two representatives of private business and two representatives of philanthropy, appointed by the Governor;
- four individuals who have demonstrated leadership and engagement in the field of early learning, appointed by the Governor; and
- two members of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, one of whom must be a member of the majority caucus and one of whom must be a member of the minority caucus, and two members of the Senate appointed by the President of the Senate, one of whom must be a member of the majority caucus and one of whom must be a member of the minority caucus.

The members of the Council will serve three-year terms. Of the initial members, six will be appointed for one-year terms, six will be appointed for two-year terms, and five will be appointed for three-year terms. Thereafter, members will be appointed for three-year terms.

The Council will be co-chaired by the representative of the Governor's Office and a non-governmental member designated by the Governor.

Members of the Council must be compensated as a class three group and reimbursed for travel expenses in accordance with state law.

The Governor may employ an executive director, who is exempt from the provisions of the state Civil Service law, and such other staff as is necessary to carry out the purposes of this chapter. The Governor will fix the salary of the executive director in accordance with state law.

The Council is required to monitor and measure its progress and annually report to the Governor and the appropriate committees of the Legislature on the progress, findings, and recommendations of the Council.

The Council is required to establish one or more technical advisory committees, as needed. Membership of such advisory committees should include the following: representatives of any state agency the Council deems appropriate, including the Higher Education Coordinating Board; family home child care providers, child care center providers, and college or university child care providers; early childhood development experts; representatives of school districts and teachers involved in the provision of child care and preschool programs; representatives of Resource and Referral programs; parent education specialists; pediatric or other health professionals; representatives of citizen groups concerned with child care and early learning; representatives of labor organizations; and representatives of Head Start and ECEAP agencies.

Child Care Coordinating Committee

The Child Care Coordinating Committee is removed from state law.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.